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Mr. Stephen Fuhr

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the defence committee.

This morning we have Ambassador Ala Beleavschi from Moldova to talk to us about Russian aggression in its relationship with Moldova and in the region in general, and perhaps any kind of co-operation that's happening in the region between Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

As you know, Ambassador, the Ukrainians were just here; we spoke to them and got an update on what's happening in the region. It was unfortunate for us to hear that things are actually getting worse, not better.

With that, I'm going to give you the floor, and you can engage with the committee for as long as you need to about what's happening in Moldova vis-à-vis Russia, and then we can get to questions.

Thank you for coming this morning.

Her Excellency Ms. Ala Beleavschi (Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Canada): Thank you so much. I'm glad that I have enough time to brief you a little bit on the developments in Moldova in terms of, first of all, the security threats to my country, and also to the entire region.

Mr. Chairman, vice-chairs, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, I'm truly honoured to be speaking today in front of this esteemed committee. May I first and foremost thank the chair for giving me this opportunity to speak. It was just a day ago that my foreign minister wrapped up his very productive visit to Canada. It was such a privilege and honour for us to have a chance to speak with Chair Fuhr about what concerns Moldova. It's out of that meeting, actually, that this idea has come up and, Chair, again thank you so much for offering me this opportunity to speak.

Perhaps you already had the chance to look at the maps I have provided, so that you perhaps have already noticed how tiny Moldova is compared to its neighbouring countries. This is a very important factor from the geographical and geopolitical standpoint. After regaining its independence in 1991, as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Moldova was admitted to membership of the United Nations in 1992 as a sovereign and independent state. However, tensions between the newly created Moldova and the eastern region of Moldova, which is called Transnistria—it's just situated on the border with Ukraine—have arisen. The reason why Transnistria was so anxious about the developments in the early 1990s was that it was that region that actually was against breaking away from the Soviet Union and disappearing, and so did the Soviet Union.

Since then, a short military war has broken out, which lasted a few months. We then, in July 1992, were able to secure a ceasefire agreement between Moldova and the Russian Federation, which kept its forces on the territory of Transnistria at that time under the pretext that they were safeguarding a huge stockpile of munition dating back to the Second World War.

We have managed to secure that ceasefire agreement. Twenty-six years later, Russian military forces, the so-called operational group of the Russian forces, remain stationed on the territory of Moldova in that Transnistrian region. Its presence on the Moldovan territory is illegal and contrary to the UN charter, the OSCE founding document, international law, and the Moldovan constitution, which prohibits the stationing on its territory of foreign troops without the consent of the host country.

● (0850)

Who would have thought that after gaining its independence almost three decades ago, it would still have to struggle for its integrity, independence, and sovereignty, and that instead of focusing on economic and democratic transformations and on building a functional democracy, I would say, my country continues to be exposed to multiple threats to its sovereignty, independence, and national security?

The breakaway region claims independence and international recognition, but with the exception of the three breakaway countries in the post-Soviet area, namely Georgian South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, the international community has not recognized the independence of these self-proclaimed states.

This secessionist regime is heavily supported by Moscow financially, politically, and militarily. The region is home to over 1,400 Russian troops belonging to the Russian operational forces. As I mentioned, I don't want to create confusion between the Russian operational forces and the so-called peacekeeping forces, which include Russia, Moldova, representatives of the Transnistrian secessionist regime, and 10 observers from Ukraine. They do not comply, actually, with either OSCE standards or UN standards for peacekeeping.

I don't want to create confusion between the two forces. There are 1,400 Russian operational forces stationed in this territory on the pretext that they have to safeguard 20,000 tonnes of ammunition dating back to the Second World War. It was, by the way, the biggest stockpile of ammunition in eastern Europe. It continues to be this way.

By the way, for most of this ammunition, we don't have access to it and we cannot even make an inventory of the state of it. We don't know how much of this could be transported or how much should be destroyed on the spot because it cannot be removed. We don't have that information. The OSCE mission in Moldova also does not have access to this stockpile.

Although the Russian Federation has repeatedly committed to withdrawing its troops from the region and respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova, the situation is very different. Despite all of my country's previous attempts to convince Russia to withdraw its troops and to comply with its international obligations undertaken at the Istanbul OSCE summit back in 1999, its troops and ammunition are still there.

Furthermore, the Russian operational group conducts joint military exercises with the paramilitaries of the Transnistrian region on a regular basis, which are even increasing in intensity. Only last year they conducted more than 300 joint military exercises in Transnistria against any provisions of the international law and against any provisions of the ceasefire agreement. Further, Russia continues to enlist recruits among the local population in Transnistria into its army and launched a massive campaign of handing out Russian passports to the region's population in its attempt to stretch out the so-called Russian world abroad. It's obvious why they're doing it: they want them to have this legitimate right to defend the rights of Russian citizens.

● (0855)

The presence of the Russian troops and ammunition on the Moldovan territory poses serious threats to the region, disregards the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Moldova, and undermines the international efforts aimed at the peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. The threat of escalation and further destabilization of the security situation in the country and the neighbouring countries, especially Ukraine, is very high.

Moldovan governments have consistently advocated for an unconditional withdrawal of the Russian troops from our territory, as their stationing is not based on any legal framework or consent of the host country. It is therefore my particular pleasure and honour to voice from this important rostrum, my government's high appreciation for the solidarity Canada has shown towards Moldova's endeavours to promote a UN General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military troops from the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

Canada has recently taken the decision to co-sponsor that resolution, the first country to have decided to do so. It triggered, by the way, a response from other countries, and today we have nine co-sponsors of that resolution. It will be debated on June 22—so pretty soon. Hopefully, it will give us the possibility of raising the issue at this high level, although of course we cannot envisage the outcome, because Russia certainly has taken serious steps to prevent that resolution from being moved.

In addition, Moldova remains highly vulnerable to hybrid threats to its energy, information, and cybersecurity, which confirms the need to boost the country's defence capabilities. With about 6,500 active-duty military personnel, the Moldovan army remains quite untrained and underequipped compared to the 7,500-strong, Moscow-backed Transnistrian force, not including, of course, the Russian operational troops stationed in that region.

Last year, the pro-European and pro-western Moldovan government adopted its national defence strategy. It includes, among other things, a commitment to increase training of the Moldovan military to take part in international peacekeeping operations. The Moldovan peacekeeping battalions are currently carrying out their mission in Kosovo. It is the 22nd Battalion. Previously, under NATO command, we participated in the peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. We are prepared to consider sending our battalion to Mali as well.

Furthermore, the Transnistrian conflict continues to impact negatively, overall, Moldova's political, social, and economic development. In addition, a general state of uncertainty as to what the country's future would look like generates distrust among large groups of the population in their government, and the democratic transformations they've been aspiring to polarizes their society and forces an outflow of the population from the country.

● (0900)

It is, therefore, important to remain committed to the reform agenda undertaken by my country under the association agreement that we signed with the European Union in 2014. The association agreement provides for a political association with the European Union and full economic integration. Under this agreement, we signed free trade agreements that same year, in 2014. We have an even more experience trading with the European Union than with Canada, so if you need help, just give us a signal.

The Moldovan government is well aware of the importance of domestic reforms, of course. I see here two critical strategic goals: a profound systemic modernization of the country by embracing democratic values, ensuring the rule of law and an independent judiciary, on the one hand; and on the other, by encouraging free entreprencurship, supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises, and continuously investing in training and education as key sectors of economic growth.

Concurrently, restoring mutual trust between both banks of the Dniester River, showing to the population of Transnistria the benefits of a closer co-operation with Europe, combined with a clear strategic direction of development and a European integration perspective for the country, can bring these deliverables so much needed in this society. The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea also carry major risks for Moldova. At the same time, Russia may at any time open up a second front to the west of the Ukrainian border, which proves how much the security of both Moldova and Ukraine are intertwined.

It is, therefore, of paramount importance for the two neighbouring countries to work closely together towards addressing more efficiently these threats. The Moldovan government continues to support Ukraine in its efforts to overcome the crisis in Donbass and to solve the Crimea problem through political and diplomatic means in order to restore peace and regain Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Republic of Moldova condemned the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation and supports Ukraine's efforts to resolve the separatist conflict in Donbass based on the Minsk accords.

A good example of such co-operation is the joint Georgia-Moldova-Ukraine Inter-Parliamentary Assembly—it was actually created last week—for the purpose of creating a common front to more efficiently withstand the security threats. It was also created with a view to moving together to get closer to the national objective of my country, closer to EU full-fledged membership.

Also, a joint Moldova-Canada border and customs control launched together with the EU border assistance mission occurred last year. We really believe that we will be able to gain full control of the border between Moldova and Ukraine, especially on the Transnistrian segment.

● (0905)

That border with Ukraine stretches 405 kilometres. Having a more advanced dialogue with the European Union through the implementation of the association agreements, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia aspire to a full-fledged membership of the European Union. As in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, Moldova has made its strategic choice: European integration. In fact, this is not merely an option for our countries; it is a vital necessity.

We hope that in this important and—without exaggeration—crucial time for our countries, our partners and friends, the European Union, Canada, and the U.S., will show their continued solidarity and support. Therefore, we warmly welcome recent signals coming from Canada about its openness to view our three countries through a single regional lens, and to adopt accordingly a common regional approach. I wish to assure you of my government's willingness to engage more actively in this important dialogue with the Canadian government.

I will perhaps stop here in order to allow for more communication with you, and I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

I'm going to yield the floor to MP Robillard. You have seven minutes for your first question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Beleavschi for her presence here this morning. I thank her for answering our questions.

Ms. Beleavschi, what do you think about the joint border crossing agreement signed two months ago by Ukraine and Moldova? How do you think this could affect domestic security in both those countries?

● (0910)

[*English*]

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: The border control—it's just border and customs control—has been signed, as I mentioned earlier, with the assistance of the EU border assistance mission. It has been signed in order to ensure by these actions that we stop the smuggling of goods and arms and trafficking in people, which has developed so much in that region.

Second, we wanted to make sure that we offer the opportunity for the Transnistrian region to have a one-window registration for the goods they are exporting or importing, which actually facilitates trade, by ruling out bureaucratic obstacles to this trade. Although criticized quite heavily by both the Transnistrian regime and Russia, it has proven to be quite efficient. Since July of last year when this common border control was signed, it has proven to be really a good idea. More than that, it's only at one crossing point where we have launched this common control. We have, all in all, nine of them. We believe that, with the Ukrainian government's willingness to co-operate further on, we will be able to gain full control of that territory.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

Do you see Russia's demand that Russian be recognized as the second official language in Moldova as an example of its aggressive behaviour?

[*English*]

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: According to the constitution of Moldova, the Russian language was widely considered to be the language of intercultural communication. It does not have an official status in Moldova. We have only one official language, which is Romanian. The status of the Russian language as a means of intercultural communication dates back to the time when we were part of the Soviet Union. Today, this is already an outdated provision. We don't need it. The younger generation doesn't speak Russian. With the exception of the media, which was widely owned by Russian channels, they do not speak or learn Russian at school, so it's usage in Moldova has diminished. Only the elderly population speaks mainly Russian. We don't believe that the Russian language has to have a special status, especially if you take into consideration the fact that the composition of the population of Moldova shows that the first and largest group is, of course, Moldovans, and the second largest group is Ukrainians. Why, then, Ukrainian? Ukrainians will not claim to have a special status for their language.

This is why we decided it is no longer right to have a specific status given to the Russian language. Actually, the Constitutional Court recently confirmed that it is already time for us to get rid of this provision in the constitution. It's actually not in the constitution, but in the law on the functioning of languages in Moldova.

● (0915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

Do you think that the Donbass region, which has been in conflict since 2014, will do the same thing as Transnistria, which separated in 1992?

[English]

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: What is happening today in the eastern region of Ukraine unfortunately very much resembles the pattern used by Moscow in Transnistria in Moldova. It is clearly in the interest of Moscow to have a protracted, frozen conflict on our territory. The reasons for this are very obvious. First, Moldova is being used as a buffer zone between NATO and the EU, which stops at the western border of Moldova. You see from the map that Moldova is bordering Romania, which is part of NATO and the European Union. To have Moldova under Russian control is actually what Russia wants to maintain. This influence will be used by Russia any time it feels any future potential threats to its territory, although we don't have a common border with Russia.

What is happening in Transnistria and this frozen conflict very much gives Russia a good example of what to do with the Donbass region. We have been warning our Ukrainian friends of the so-called threat of the Transnistriazation of Donbass. Russia would prefer to have that region in a protracted conflict, which will be used as a button whenever Russia needs it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

MP Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellency, it's always great to see you. I appreciate all you're doing to make sure that we parliamentarians are aware of the problems that Moldova faces in Transnistria, and of the challenges that you have domestically in dealing with it.

I know we've spoken many times about the ongoing occupation of Transnistria by Russian forces. Last time we talked, we discussed the OSCE monitoring mission there. Who is in charge of that mission?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Well, if I'm not mistaken, today the head of mission position is held by Britain, but I might be wrong. I know that it was the Americans for a few consecutive terms.

It's interesting because the OSCE mission very clearly understands what the major objective is: to find a peaceful and long-lasting resolution to the Transnistrian conflict. They have engaged in a dialogue with the Transnistrian regime as well, although they have very limited access to that territory, which means that their possibilities are very limited indeed.

We conduct regular consultations in the so-called 5+2 format. It has been created to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Unfortunately, the negotiations do not always bring any clear or tangible results.

Today, the presidency of the OSCE is held by Italy, and the political representative of the OSCE in the 5+2 format is the former Italian foreign minister, Franco Frattini, who, by the way, is a good friend of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. They have mentioned this on several occasions. He tries to play a constructive role. We had hoped there would be more progress achieved during this presidency.

Recently, we signed five protocol agreements with Transnistria. It was under the Austrian presidency, at this time last year. We have signed agreements on such matters as recognition of Transnistrian diplomas. We also signed an agreement giving the Moldovan population on the right bank of the Dniester River the right to cultivate their lands, which are unfortunately situated in the Transnistrian part.

It's not yet there, but we have signed an agreement and we have tried to implement this de facto protocol.

Yes?

● (0920)

Mr. James Bezan: You can go ahead.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: We also signed an agreement that allows Transnistrian cars to participate in international traffic with special licence plates. They used to have their own, but they were not recognized anywhere. It also gives us the possibility, at least, of seeing who is participating in international traffic. We had many problems to solve when someone was involved in an accident or other situation abroad. We kept receiving these signals from Transnistria.

These are a few elements. Also, restoring telecommunication between the two banks of the Dniester River was one of the—

Mr. James Bezan: Do the people of Transnistria participate in Moldovan elections?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: No, they have refused to do so.

Mr. James Bezan: Is there no way to set up proper polling places?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: The Transnistrian population is around half a million. Out of that half-million, our figures show that around 360,000 people hold Moldovan passports. Especially since 2014, when Moldova was the first among the countries in the region to get a visa-free regime with the European Union, the number of requests for Moldovan passports from Transnistrians has increased.

Mr. James Bezan: It went up.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: But these people also have Russian passports. As I told you, there is a massive campaign to hand in Russian passports now. They have Ukrainian passports, although this contradicts the Ukrainian law because that country doesn't allow multiple citizenship compared to Moldova, where we do have this right. They can use any passport they want at any time, yet they will not allow participation in the elections. If they wish to, they have to travel to the right bank of the Dniester River to take part in the election. The polling stations would not be open there.

Now the Moldovan Parliament has adopted a law to provide for a mixed vote, which means that half will be proportional representation, and half will be one...election per constituency, so one nominal —how do you call it?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): One vote.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes, exactly, single member, which this time will provide for Transnistria having its representative in the national Parliament.

Mr. James Bezan: I'd like to head over to the military side. Does Moldova have any defence partnerships with any countries in the West?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Moldova is officially, and according to the constitution, a neutral country. Having said that, we have very strong co-operation with NATO. Last year the Moldovan government decided to inaugurate a NATO liaison office in Moldova, which was heavily criticized by part of the population and especially by our friends to the east, or northeast. However, we tried to convince them that through the so-called "IPAP", the partnership and co-operation agreement with NATO.... We tried to prove that NATO is doing a great job in training and equipping our national army to make it stronger and to consolidate its defence capabilities.

● (0925)

The Chair: MP Garrison, go ahead.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the ambassador.

I want to go back to the OSCE mission, which Mr. Bezan characterized as a monitoring mission. I think that, in fact, it's a negotiating mandate rather than a monitoring mandate. That's my understanding.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: I looks like it is indeed very much limited, this monitoring mission.

Mr. Randall Garrison: But the mandate is to facilitate direct talks between Transnistria and Moldova. You mentioned the number of practical agreements you have managed to reach.

There was a statement by the head of the mission, Michael Scanlan, in May. I just want to read short part of it. He said:

> Over the past months, Chisinau and Tiraspol have demonstrated a genuine commitment to advance the settlement process. This was evident at all levels of the negotiations starting from the intense series of meetings of the working groups lead by the Chief Negotiators, to the personal engagement of the Moldovan and Transdniestrian leadership.

It's a bit more of a positive statement that progress is being made in these direct talks that would lead eventually to a settlement and remove the opportunity for Russia to exploit that conflict.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Indeed, there is the only official form of negotiations, which is the 5+2 process. Five means Moldova, the Transnistrian regime, Ukraine, OSCE, and as observers we have the European Union and the United States.

Of course, we do not rule out the fact that we have to be engaging more with the Transnistrian authorities in order to build this confidence, which has been eroded so much. Our government has initiated a dialogue with the Transnistria region in order to start, because there are several baskets in the negotiations. The third basket is called the political basket, but we are far from that because the political one means that we have to start negotiating the legal status of Transnistria. We see its legal status as consisting of a large autonomy within the internationally recognized borders of Moldova. But we are far from that basket yet. Still, we consider that two baskets, which refer mainly to the economic and social issues, will serve the purpose of building this mutual trust. This is why we believe that we indeed progressed in adopting these five protocols last year. We are very close to adopting an additional two protocols this year so that our people on both sides of the Dniester River can really see that we are very open and are creating all of the necessary prerequisites for them to feel that they are being supported. They are part of Moldova. They are our population. We cannot ignore them. We cannot ignore their problems, so we indeed try to be as constructive and productive in our direct dialogue. This is true.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Even though Canada is not part of the so-called 5+2 process, do you see—

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Within the OSCE, yes.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Yes, except as an OSCE member.

Do you see ways that Canada could help support progress toward an eventual settlement with Transnistria? Are there things that Canada could do to facilitate further agreements?

● (0930)

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Canada has been, as I mentioned, very supportive of Moldova's endeavours to solve the problem. It has been since I remember only.... I was posted to Washington in my first diplomatic mission, and I remember Canada's very firm support for Moldova's territorial integrity and independence. The recent example, as I mentioned to you, was the decision to co-sponsor the UN General Assembly resolution on the complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory. However, I also believe that strengthening Moldova's defence capabilities would be very much appreciated by my government because this is where we clearly see Canada's role.

I know how much Canada is doing in terms of equipping and retraining the Ukrainian military. We very much hope that we could be part of those projects that are being developed in Ukraine by Canada. For example—and I have been pleading for this for quite a long period of time since I came here—if Canada could see Moldova in the common regional context, and if Canada could see Moldova having the very same problems of historical heritage and threats to the country, and if it could treat both countries in a common regional context, perhaps this will help very much.

I will just add one thing. I know that the chair will now raise this white paper, white flag, but I will tell you something. Under the Yanukovych regime, the previous regime in Ukraine, there was very little co-operation between the two countries. Moreover, Ukraine had to play the Moscow card in the transnational conflict, unfortunately. What is happening today is completely different. We have very good co-operation and a very good understanding between the two countries.

What we need now is that, when you have Canada so much committed to help Ukraine, by connecting Moldova to this assistance you're not simply making your country more present in Moldova. You facilitate contacts at various levels in various fields. You can bring together experts so that they can work together. This will be for the benefit of Ukraine, of Moldova, and of the entire region.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much, Ambassador. It's great to be with you. Thank you for your time.

I'd like to see if you have any additional parts along the same line. I don't want to change the tack of questions too much. If you want to say anything else about the regional analysis, I'd be happy to hear any further thoughts that you have.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Thank you, indeed.

We have recently seen some good signals from the Canadian government with regard to understanding, first of all, that the three countries of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia are facing the same problems and the same threats. There is increasing understanding that these three countries have to be treated commonly.

We hope, indeed, that the Canadian government will draft a common approach with regard to our countries. The signals we receive and my foreign minister's visit a couple of days ago proved that the discussions we had are on a good track.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much for that.

I want to stay with the regional lens, but even widen it a bit more and talk about the European Union more broadly. As you know, Canada has a very strong relationship with the European Union, not just in the context of the recently concluded CETA but in many other respects as well.

I want to take you back to a statement from 2013. Formerly, in his role as Russian deputy prime minister, Dmitry Rogozin said that if Moldova made a move towards the EU it could say goodbye to Transnistria. To what extent is that statement still accurate? How do you see the EU playing in the triangle of Canada, EU, and Moldova, perhaps, as an answer to that conundrum?

● (0935)

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Rogozin had a very interesting position at the time he made that statement. He was appointed by President Putin as special envoy for Transnistria—no less and no more than that. In parallel, he was chair of the Moldovan-Russian economic cooperation committee. This was needed by him to travel as many as times as possible to Moldova, under the pretext of his capacity as chair of the joint economic committee. But every time he was travelling to Transnistria, he was actually participating in all sorts of activities that were called to celebrate the independence of Transnistria.

Of course, Moldova could not stand that behaviour, especially since he was insulting the dignity of the Moldovan people with all sorts of things. This was one of the mildest, actually. He has been insulting, using rude language with regard to the constitutional authorities of Moldova and the population of Moldova. I won't get into giving you any quotes, but he's been declared as *persona non grata* today in Moldova. The problems have not stopped here, of course.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: On the pathway towards closer affiliation with the EU, how do you see that today?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: The role of the European Union is huge. It's not only that we have signed this association agreement with the European Union. We see it as a blueprint for our reforms. Actually, it sets up very clear steps that Moldova has to take in order to comply with the European norms and standards and to at some time become eligible for full integration into the European Union.

We are not naive. We understand that there is clear fatigue in terms of EU enlargement, but the association agreement has given us a national objective towards which we are aiming. As part of the 5+2 negotiation format, the European Union is playing an increased role by providing consultancy and trying to engage Transnistrians in the activities that will bring Transnistria to the understanding that a European future is much better for them than what Russia offers.

If anyone would like me to elaborate a little bit more, I would welcome this question. I would really like to speak about what EU does for Transnistria today. This is very important.

May I, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's Mr. Spengemann's time.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Yes, go ahead. Absolutely.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Okay. Good.

First, in signing the association agreement, Moldova did not exclude Transnistria from the provisions of this agreement. Today Transnistria exports over 70% of its goods to the European market and only 12% to the Russian market. This used to be completely different. A few years ago, Russia was the major market for Transnistria. Businesses in Transnistria clearly see the advantage.

Second, for the Transnistrian population, the possibility of travelling freely to the European Union is another deliverable. They see that we have to engage with Europe. We hope that Transnistrian businesses will be the force that puts pressure on their regime not to distance itself from Moldova but rather to seek the common direction.

● (0940)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's a very important strategic thought for us as we engage with Europe at an economic level.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that's my time.

The Chair: It is your time.

We'll go to five-minute questions now. The first question will go to MP Rioux.

Jean, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): I will speak French.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your presence here. You are shedding some light on the situation.

The link with Ukraine is very interesting. As you know, Canadian Defence is very present there.

You answered one of my questions concerning the economy. According to what I've been told, 70% of trade takes place with Europe. That change happened quickly. What is the basis for your economy? What are the main products? What is your GDP based on?

People often discuss the Russian presence. If we don't take the military presence into account, what percentage of your population is Russian?

[*English*]

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Traditionally, Moldova has exported to the east. In terms of major products, Moldova has always been regarded as an orchard of the Soviet Union. One of the biggest industries is the agriculture and food industry. In Moldova we grow and produce organic fruit and vegetables. We have beautiful wines because our soils are very fit for the purpose. We grow very good quality grapes.

Besides, we understand that being an agricultural country you are always vulnerable to the climate conditions, especially today when we see these huge climate changes.

Moldova has developed today a very strong IT sector and we provide software for big international companies such as Microsoft. Great Britain imports software from Moldova; it is the biggest buyer of our IT products.

We also develop the industries that produce cables for cars. We provide cables for BMW and Volkswagen. This activity is being developed within the nine free economic zones where we offer very good fiscal incentives for the countries or businesses that wish to operate on Moldovan territory.

Today we have the biggest German companies, such as Dräxlmaier, operating in Moldova, producing these car cables. We have two Japanese companies that created thousands of new jobs that are helping keep the Moldovan population, especially the young population, in Moldova, so they stay rather than leave the country. Unfortunately, almost one million people, out of a population of 4.5 million, have left the country in search of jobs.

What those big international companies are doing is creating jobs, and people stay in Moldova. While the process is still far from being resolved, this is where we see our future, the IT industry production sector, and the agriculture and food industry will stay, of course, because we have the most fertile soils in Europe. In Moldova, it's almost 90% black soil, called *chernozem*. That is where we see ourselves right now.

By the way, I started telling you that we used to export traditionally to the eastern market. Today, 67% of our exports go to the European Union.

Regarding the composition of the population, it is very similar to what we see today in Transnistria. The major population, the biggest ethnic group, is, of course, Moldovans. Then come Ukrainians. Roughly 70% of the population is Moldovan, and then we have the Ukrainians, Russians, and a small minority called Gagauz, which is a Turkic-speaking population but very tiny. It's 0.3% of the population.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to yield the floor to MP Yurdiga.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome the ambassador to our committee.

We have seen Russia over the years expand its influence over other nations, whether through misinformation, using the Internet, or whatever other means they have at their disposal. Now I understand that Moldova has passed anti-propaganda laws to combat Russian propaganda, or any propaganda. Can you comment on this new law?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: I wouldn't tell you that it has been very popular in the country, but we had to do it. Unfortunately, because of hybrid warfare conducted in Ukraine, we have not been immune to this. Russia has been meddling in our elections over the course of quite a few years.

The 2016 presidential elections clearly proved that. A massive misinformation campaign was launched through the Russian-controlled media, and we had to take measures, because otherwise the population was being brainwashed by the channels and the programs that were broadcasted by the Russia-controlled media.

Last year we actually drafted a law. It is called the anti-propaganda law, but it is actually amendments to the audio-visual code to not allow broadcasts on the territory of Moldova of programs involving news, analysis, and all kinds of programs that will impose Russia's opinion of what is happening in the world including in Moldova.

Actually, it was not aimed only against Russia. Officially it is called the amendments to the law that will not allow the broadcast of the programs that come from the countries that have not signed the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. Moldova is part of it; Russia is not.

Today our population does have access to all sorts of advertisements and programs from Russia that have, let's say, cultural content, but not news and analytical programs. Yes, it has been criticized. We have been criticized. We are breaching the right to free access to information, yes, but who has the right to impose their own view of what is happening and to brainwash our population? It is polarized today due to these activities that Russia has conducted and, unfortunately, keeps conducting on our territory.

Also, social media is heavily used by Russia. They have created a huge network of non-governmental organizations. They have posted bloggers to write specifically on Moldova and to present this misinformation and fake news about what is happening in Moldova in order to make it evident or to show the pro-Russian parties in a rosy light. The president represents this party, and it's no wonder he won the elections in 2016.

● (0950)

Mr. David Yurdiga: I know that a lot of communications between individuals are done on Facebook and all of these other platforms. That's how the younger generation communicates. Are there any limitations on individuals expressing their opinions to each other on these media? I'm trying to understand how far this law goes. Is this for media outlets only?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: It's only for media, and by the way, everyone is absolutely free to express his or her opinion. We have freedom of assembly. We have the freedom to express our opinions in all ways, including through social media.

Each member of the government has a very clearly set schedule of meetings with the population. They travel to the regions to meet with the population. There is an undertaking from the government to examine and reply to each petition, which is a written request for information from civil society, the wider society. Each governmental department replies to all sorts of requests for information, relating to salaries, incomes, and so on, even if doing so is not convenient or comfortable for someone. We have a law that makes it transparent. There is accountability of the officials in terms of their incomes. We fill in declarations, and the society has access to those declarations. They know exactly everything that relates to their incomes and the finances.

Those are just a few examples, of course.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Ambassador. Thank you for being here.

You may have touched on some of this, but I'm interested in the relationship between the Moldovan people and Ukrainians. I'm interested in the relationship between the countries that Russia threatens with aggression, and how they participate. What is their relationship? You have a physical line of troops, by the looks of it, keeping you from 80% of your shared border with Ukraine. Is there a relationship between the Ukrainians and those around them?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes. If you mean people-to-people contacts, they are absolutely great. First of all, traditionally, this was the region where Moldovans spent their holidays. My good friend, the Ambassador of Moldova to Ukraine, told me about the number of border crossings. I believe he said there were four million crossings in 2016. Some were for personal reasons, because we have many mixed families, and kinship relations are very close. We also have businesses with Ukraine. As I mentioned, we spend holidays over there. There's a very good understanding between our two peoples. Traditionally, it has been this way. Despite all the problems with Transnistria, and despite who was ruling Ukraine previously, contacts have continued. Just the figure of four million crossing the border speaks for itself. We have only a 3.5 million population today. You can imagine how frequently we deal with Ukrainians.

You mentioned the relations at the level of governments. I spoke today about the parliaments deciding to unite their forces. The same attempts, the same efforts, are being made now to work together at the level of the executive power, at the level of the governments. You know, President Poroshenko comes from our region. He speaks Romanian, by the way. He is very proud of it, and when they meet at the high level, he very often switches to Romanian when he wants to talk to us, just to show that he has very much in common with our country and that he remembers his roots.

● (0955)

Mr. Darren Fisher: So you have political, economic, and social connections.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Absolutely, at all levels.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Do you have to cross the border in the northern portion, or are you able to freely cross over into Ukraine and move back and forth?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: We not only have the Transnistrian segment of the border where we used to have problems, but the entire length of the border is more than 1,000 kilometres, all in all, so of course we are travelling.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Are you able to travel through the area that is occupied?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: We are not allowed in the Transnistria region, and we do not cross the border along this Transnistria segment as it is.

Mr. Darren Fisher: That's interesting.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: It's not only us. I will tell you that, at the level of the officials, of course, they're not allowed to go there, although they have families over there. From time to time, they want to visit the graves of their relatives in the Transnistrian region. They are not allowed. OSCE is not allowed to do it either.

We indeed have very limited movement on that territory.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Is that line of troops there physically limiting your ability to enter?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Do you mean the Russian troops?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Yes.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: They do not control the border itself.

Mr. Darren Fisher: But you don't—

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: But it is such an insecure region that we would rather go through other crossing points.

By the way, since we had such a good understanding with Ukrainians, Ukrainians previously allowed, if I may say, "to close eyes" about what was happening on this Transnistria segment in terms of the smuggling of goods and bringing military equipment through their territory to re-equip the Russian operational forces in Transnistria. Today it is no longer possible. Whatever Russia wants to do, it has to go through territory controlled by the legitimate authorities of Moldova. This is where they find serious problems.

The only thing that Ukraine has mentioned that will allow access is if Russia decides to withdraw its troops, Ukraine will create a corridor for them. That is the only place they will allow them to cross these borders.

Mr. Darren Fisher: For the Russians to get in and out of there and move into that little isthmus there....

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: To go by air—

Mr. Darren Fisher: Or by air

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: —to Chisinau, the capital city of Moldova.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks.

MP Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Moldova is landlocked.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes, it is.

We do have access to the Black Sea through a small portion. It's around 400 metres through the Danube River, and it's navigable, but it's landlocked today.

Mr. James Bezan: Your Excellency, I was just looking at Transnistria's flag, and it still has a sickle and hammer on it. I believe it was the last region of the former Soviet Union to finally recognize the collapse of the Soviet Union. Did they finally recognize the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Could you please repeat that?

Mr. James Bezan: Transnistria itself refused to recognize the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. What year did they finally recognize it?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: They were very much against the dissolution of the Soviet Union because they believe that their region would be much more, let's say, limited in the context of Russia. They don't have a common border with Russia. Of course, they realized at the time when the Soviet Union broke up that there would be problems in continuing communication with Russia. I believe so.

They tried to recognize these self-proclaimed entities like South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

● (1000)

Mr. James Bezan: They were practising the Brezhnev planned economy as well, were they not?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: You will see everywhere Soviet-style architecture and monuments to Vladimir Lenin all over the country. If you travel to Transnistria, you will find yourself in the former Soviet Union, and there are Russian flags with the red flag of Transnistria. You will see that there are many signs of the past.

Mr. James Bezan: The way the economy works now, is it a free market or is it still more a communist style?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Oh, no. Well, it is a very corrupt system run by oligarchs, unfortunately. There are clearly interests in Transnistria from Russian businesses, especially because they have a metallurgical steel factory that used to have a significant share in the overall Moldovan economy. Before Transnistria broke—at least it claims to have broken—from Moldova, 40% of Moldova's entire industry was from Transnistria. It was a heavily industrialized region of Moldova, and losing it was a huge blow to our economy.

At the same time, Transnistria is being heavily supported financially, subsidized, by Moscow.

I will give you one example of what is happening. You can imagine that Transnistria is having a hard time surviving today, especially with Ukraine cooperating with Moldova and not allowing them to engage in the smuggling activities. Russia is providing gas to the whole territory of Moldova, and to Transnistria, but we used to buy gas from Russia at approximately U.S. $300 per 1,000 cubic metres of gas, while Transnistrians "bought gas" at $80. This money has not been paid back to Russia. They have been given gas. They've used gas. The money they owed Russia was used to pay the salaries for maintaining the social sphere, and Russia has put this debt on Moldova. Today we have almost $7 billion in debt to Russia's Gazprom. Of this, 94% is Transnistrian debt.

Here, Russia does not recognize that Transnistria is separate. It says it's part of Moldova because of this debt.

Mr. James Bezan: Hypocrisy knows no limits.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Maybe I gave you too many details, but I hope you understand how it all works. The energy sector is a leverage.

By the way, we are trying now to diversify our market of energy supplies, and we are building a gas pipeline to connect Romania with Moldova so that we at least become less dependent on Russian energy sources.

The Chair: MP Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much.

That was very interesting, thank you.

Would you like to continue on the energy security conversation and give us a little bit more on that? Because of course, in order to do anything you want to do, I'm sure energy is an underpinning.

● (1005)

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes, absolutely, especially, as I told you, about gas. We very much depend on gas imports. Actually, 100% of the gas in Moldova is imported.

In terms of the electrical energy, we are capable of producing only 20% of our electrical energy. This comes from the plant that is situated in Transnistria. What is happening now is that they are using Russian gas to operate the plant.

We tried to diversify even that market. We used to sign contracts with Ukrainian providers, which immediately triggered huge criticism, both from Tiraspol and Moscow, who said we were trying to close the tap for Transnistria. They called it an "economic blockage" of Transnistria. Actually, this is the major source of their income, of their revenues in the budget.

It is really a very sensitive issue and very difficult to resolve. We don't want to be blamed for trying to limit or put economic pressure on Transnistria. We have to balance, and very wise policy is really needed to balance between the two.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Excellent.

Now I'd like to go back to some of that regional lens you're talking about. You mentioned what we could do in terms of looking at an agreement among the three countries together. Can you give us some idea of what your current relationship is in terms of information sharing, the training of troops or whatever, with Ukraine and Georgia, and therefore what kind of agreement you are looking for? What would that agreement look like?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: So far I mentioned to you that we have this agreement at the level of, let's say, the parliamentary dimension. Yes, we are co-operating very well in the intelligence services, and border and customs services among the three countries, although we don't have a direct common border with Georgia. We have very good co-operation at the departmental levels, let's say.

I am not aware if we have signed any specific agreements in this, but I know there is very good co-operation. During the visit of my foreign minister to Canada, we discussed the possibility of increasing co-operation between the intelligence services just to share information, which would indeed help modernize, if I may, first of all the army, and secondly, equip Moldova with the necessary means of how to better understand the threats that come, especially covert threats from outside of the country.

We really hope this will be one measure that Canada can help Moldova with in tackling the problems.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I know that we're helping to educate the Ukrainians or working with Ukraine—

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: I know. I've been knocking at the door of the Canadian government to connect Moldovans as well to these projects.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Would you see Moldovans and Ukrainians in the same room with Canadians? Is that what you're thinking?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Absolutely. We conduct—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: So not necessarily a separate delegation to all three areas?.

● (1010)

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Absolutely. We conduct common training exercises, very often under the U.S. command or under NATO command. When these exercises are being conducted in the region, Moldova's always a part of them, along with the Ukrainians and Georgians.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: MP Spengemann, you wanted a few minutes.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Chair, yes, if I could, just very briefly. Just to take a bit more of a deep dive into the history of Transnistria, why is this region special? Why is it the one region that continued to support the Soviet Union and its ideology? Is there a cultural-historical difference between Moldovans and Transnistrians that we should know about?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes. Before becoming part of the Russian empire, history shows that the biggest share of the population in that region were Moldovans and the second-biggest were Ukrainians. You know that Moldova belongs to the, let's say, Latin world. We speak a language that makes us part of the Romance group of languages. We have been part of la Francophonie since 1997. Yes, we are different from the Slavic world, yet the population has so peacefully coexisted on the territory of Moldova. We are a very multicultural society.

I believe that, in 1792, when the sixth Russian-Turkish war broke, there was an agreement that part of the territory—which, at that time, was called Bessarabia, and part of which today is Transnistria—was part of Ukraine. This explains why the second-largest ethnic group is Ukrainians. They peacefully coexist today, but there were always more, let's say, feelings that that part belonged to the Slavic world.

In 1924, this territory was proclaimed autonomous, as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, so they did have an autonomous status. It was not part of Ukraine any longer. It was largely autonomous within the Soviet Republic, so the feelings still persist that they are not supporting everything relating to our affinities with the Romanian culture.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: There's a foundation there.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Yes, they still persist and don't forget another thing. The Moldovans are the biggest ethnic minority in Transnistria, but the other two, the Ukrainians and Russians, together make up the Russian-speaking population and outnumber the Moldovans.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's very helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I'll share my time with MP Yurdiga.

Ambassador, in your opening comments, you said that the Moldovan military is undertrained and underequipped. Does the Moldovan military do any training exercises with Romania or any other neighbouring states?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: I told you that we are very interested in training and equipping our national army to make it a professional army in which soldiers would will only be recruited on a contractual basis. We are also very much interested in equipping to participate more efficiently in international peacekeeping operations. This is where Moldova and Romania agreed to co-operate just a couple of weeks ago at the level of parliamentary committees on defence. Romania agreed to provide advice on how to modernize our army, to share information, and to help train our peacekeeping battalions.

We agreed that we would join our forces, in these terms, and create mixed peacekeeping operations with Romania, with mixed battalions. Indeed, there are very good developments, in these terms. Moreover, at the level of ministers of national defence, there is also very good co-operation. I believe that the first visit of the Moldovan minister of defence, after he was invested in this office, was to Belgium—of course, to NATO headquarters in Brussels—and the second was to Bucharest.

● (1015)

Mr. James Bezan: Does your constitution, making you a neutral country, prohibit Moldova from buying weapons and armaments from other countries?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: If it's only for the purpose of defence, yes. The status of neutrality provides for Moldova to, first of all, make sure that it is well prepared against any risk. It is not being used for any other purpose than defence. It does not contradict our neutral status for us to be involved in peacekeeping forces, because we believe that this is a way to train our army, first of all, and to contribute, because Moldova really believes it has to change its status of a "consumer of security" to "provider of security". For this, we need to be well trained. That's the only thing that I can add to this.

Mr. David Yurdiga: I just want to continue along the line of my earlier questioning. In reference to the propaganda laws, does this include limiting public opinion polling, which is an important democratic right?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: I keep receiving results of all sorts of public opinion polls every day. I am confused sometimes which figures to believe or which are more accurate. There are very many, and they are absolutely not restricted. We have quite a few, by the way, non-governmental organizations that conduct opinion polls, even foreign, international non-governmental organizations, especially when it comes to showing how much of the population supports the Soviet party or the government, or how they feel about the state of things in Moldova. It helps very much to draft the right policies. It is not at all restricted.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you so much.

The Chair: MP Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to see you again, your Excellency.

I just want to get clarity. In terms of the number of armed forces that Moldova has, you mentioned 6,500 active military personnel, for a population of 4.5 million and being in a zone that is experiencing the same kind of aggression, I guess I'd call it, from Russia.

What are the initiatives to recruit armed forces personnel in Moldova? Is there a requirement for all adults to serve a certain number of years? What are you doing to recruit more armed services personnel?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: The provision in the constitution about the neutrality of Moldova has been only just discussed. The then government or the president, especially, the former chair of the Communist Party of Moldova at that time, even made a move to reduce the numbers of the National Army, claiming that the neutrality of the country did not require having such a huge army which, of course, requires much financial support.

It has been reduced. Today we are recruiting; it's mandatory for all youngsters who reach the age of 18 to serve. Exceptions are granted or recruitment can be delayed if they have entered university, for example. It can be delayed for the time they are studying, but then they still have to go through some training. Today, we believe this is still not a very efficient tool. We have to make our army professional. People assume the responsibility, and if they decide to join the army, this should be on a contractual basis, and perhaps for one or two years. It's being discussed.

● (1020)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Since recruitment is mandatory, whether post-university studies or right after you turn 18, how long are they require to stay in the armed forces? Is it mandatory for two years?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: It's for two years.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You mentioned that, with a relatively young country of 27 years, two of the main focuses are the systematic modernization of Moldova and supporting entrepreneurship with a focus on training and education. In terms of modernization, what are the key priorities for Moldova? We heard that when it comes to conflict areas it's never one dimensional. It's never just a defence issue: it's political; it's governance; it's many things. What would you say would be a priority in systematic modernization?

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: The association agreement provides very specific chapters in all spheres of activities, and provides very concrete steps that have to be undertaken to reform the national economy, and to reform the justice sector, because that sector, unfortunately, needs urgent attention.

By the way, this is one of the reasons when I'm knocking at the door of the Canadian government, I keep saying that you have to be present with your huge democratic experience and try to share your expertise with our courts, because we need to ensure transparency of the courts. Sometimes you have a feeling that it's a state in a state. Unfortunately the judiciary has been quite corrupt, and that was the reason the government decided to take a very painful step and drastically increase their salaries, but keeping them accountable at the same time, to make sure there is no bribery in the judiciary any longer and that it is all transparent. The reform of the judiciary will be one of the priorities of the Moldovan government.

We have to make sure that we provide all the necessary conditions for entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprises, to have guarantees that the money they invest and the businesses they are opening are under the umbrella of the state. So we provide all of the necessary legal framework for them to work freely and have the support of the government.

Investing in education is the only way we can ensure that this country has a future. We're considered one of the best countries in terms of the quality of studies. We have a multilingual population. We speak several languages. Besides Moldovan, people very often speak Russian. They speak English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. Living in this multilingual society, when these people finish school they have no competitive, well-paying jobs, and are looking abroad in search of better lives and better paying jobs. Investing in education and concurrently creating jobs for them to stay at home will perhaps be the third or fourth objective of my government.

● (1025)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

The Chair: I have a sense that you're going to witness our democratic process in action here in a second, but I just want to make sure there are no more questions before we get into a couple of motions.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: No, I see Mr. Bezan.

The Chair: First of all, thank you, everyone, for the questioning.

Madam Ambassador, thank you for coming.

I'll sum up in a second, but there are some motions, if you could be patient. I'll recognize Mr. Bezan first.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't know if the committee is aware, but back in November of 2014, the House passed the following unanimous motion:

> The this House reiterate Canada's continued support for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law around the world; reaffirm Canada's support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and the inviolability of its borders; encourage the efforts of the Republic of Moldova to further their advancement of democratic reforms; affirm the Republic of Moldova's sovereign right to determine its own partnerships free of external coercion and pressure; note the Republic of Moldova's signature of an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the European Union on June 27, 2014, and ratification of the agreement on July 2, 2014; and welcome the Republic of Moldova's choice to pursue the path of European integration.

In that vein, I move that the Standing Committee on National Defence encourage the Government of Canada to do the following:

> 1. That the Government of Canada negotiate a defence and security agreement with the Republic of Moldova.
>
> 2. That the Government of Canada add Moldova to the Automatic Firearms Country Control List.
>
> 3. That the Government of Canada send an election observation mission to Moldova for the November 2018 parliamentary elections.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: Thank you very much.

May I just comment? It's not a question, but I will comment only that we are approaching parliamentary elections this year, in late November. It will be, again, about a geopolitical choice. Again, the population is very polarized regarding which direction to take: forward to closer co-operation with Europe, or back to its Soviet past.

Can I ask you to support another motion calling for democratic, free, and transparent elections to be held in Moldova, first of all? Secondly, sending a signal of the support from the Canadian Parliament for Moldova's efforts to reform the country and to integrate into the European space of common values would be very concrete support from Canada and from your Parliament.

I call upon you to raise your hand in supporting that motion. I have been in touch with the Canada-Moldova Parliamentary Friendship Group, and I understand there is a clear understanding of the necessity for such kinds of motions.

The Chair: Before we move to more discussion on this, from a procedural standpoint this can't go to the House unless it's contained within a report, according to the clerk. We can talk about it, but there are a couple of things. I have an idea of what Sven is going to move, and then we're talking about time, because you were saying this is time-sensitive.

Mr. James Bezan: Indeed, as the ambassador just said, the elections are this fall. We have to get the government moving on that now.

The Chair: Right. Given the time we have available before the House rises—and I know what we've asked you to do already—we could prioritize this. In theory, if Sven moves a motion to report to the House, this could be a recommendation. We could ask the clerk to down tools on the Ukraine report, because this is more time-sensitive, and to put effort into getting this out before we rise to address your concern on timing.

Mr. James Bezan: You ruled. I accept your ruling.

The Chair: Okay, so are you going to withdraw your motion and let him move his?

Mr. James Bezan: Yes, you ruled.

The Chair: Well, it's out of order, essentially.

● (1030)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): On a point of order, our witness today mentioned a couple of motions as well. How will they be incorporated?

Mr. James Bezan: It has to come from the report.

The Chair: I recommend that we let Mr. Spengemann move his motion. We can discuss this more fully at that point, and then we can make a decision.

Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You've anticipated very accurately what I was going to move. I'd like to move that the committee ask the analysts to prepare a report on today's session with the ambassador, and that it be tabled in the House.

The Chair: Let's have a discussion on that. This would be a good time to bring up your points.

Mr. James Bezan: I would suggest that the three recommendations I just made be part of that, as well as a couple of other comments the ambassador made.

We have to stay somewhat in our wheelhouse, although we sometimes wander into the foreign affairs purview.

Mr. Darren Fisher: You're jumping....

Mr. James Bezan: In the report, I believe we can make some of the comments you've made, Ambassador, to help the democratic process and make European integration by Moldova a priority.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion around that?

Mr. Randall Garrison: I think we are straying quite a long way from our mandate as the defence committee in the recommendations Mr. Bezan has suggested. Without having those in front of me, I have some difficulty because, if we're going to make recommendations, I think they would have to include Canadian support for the OSCE mission that's leading toward a negotiated settlement. I would oppose any report that did not include such a recommendation.

The Chair: All right. As in any report we've ever done, the recommendations can be negotiated amongst us once we get there. But there seems to be a will to do our report to the House. So unless there is more discussion on that, we can talk about the details of any recommendations when we see a report. At this time, I'd like to call for a vote on the motion put forward by Mr. Spengemann.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I think I'm going to leave it there unless there is anything else.

Cheryl.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, last day I did raise a motion that had been printed as a recommendation. I reworded it a bit because when I presented that motion, for some reason, they felt it was incomplete or maybe it was an objection to studying the role of artificial intelligence in the military. So I made it a bit broader and I would just like to table it before we go so that the analysts will have a chance to think about it over the summer, should the committee decide to engage in this study.

The Chair: Is that the one tabled yesterday via electronic...?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: No, it's not. It's a new one. I gave the 48-hour notice. I would like to move that the Standing Committee on National Defence undertake a study on the application of artificial intelligence in unmanned aerial, naval, terrestrial vehicles, robotic technological development weapon systems, and Canadian Forces personnel thought analysis, and that the committee commence planning the study during the final stages of the peacekeeping study for study immediately afterwards.

The Chair: Okay, I take it you're tabling that. I note that.

Are you withdrawing your previous motion?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, so noted.

Ambassador, thank you very much for coming today. I'm thrilled that the committee is going to report to the House on this to highlight and underpin Russia's unacceptable, illegal, and belligerent behaviour in the region. I also think this report will better inform any future decisions the Government of Canada may make vis-à-vis the region and Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine. I'm thrilled that this is now on the record and will be reported to the House.

Now, unless you have something else to say, I was going to adjourn the meeting.

Ms. Ala Beleavschi: No, I just want to thank you very much for your attention and for your commitment to considering how best to engage Canada in supporting young democracies like Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. Thank you for that, and I am open to co-operation whenever you believe it necessary.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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